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Summary

Masha Greenbaum was born in 1927 in Kaunas, Lithuania. Her father was Sholem Halevy Ralsky, born in London; her mother was Judith (née Tatak?) born in Grodno. He ran a tobacco cigarette factory on behalf of a German company. Masha had one sister, Susanna, four years younger. As one of the largest minorities in Lithuania, established 700-1000 years ago, and with special privileges from the Treaty of Paris after WWI, Jews had good relationships with Lithuanians with little assimilation. She described her school and social life in the 1930s.

Some Jews began to emigrate as quotas at universities and jobs were creating economic difficulties. In 1938, the family visited her grandmother in London but ignored her entreaties to stay, despite knowing of Hitler's treatment of German Jews. In 1939, the Soviets took over after forcing concessions on the local government, and solidified it in 1940. Her father's factory was nationalized along with most other businesses, but he was retained for his expertise. The Soviets sent many Jewish and Lithuanian civic leaders to Siberia.

As the Germans invaded in 1940, but before they arrived in her town, she witnessed Lithuanians killing unarmed Jews of all ages in Slobodka as looting began. Due to their historic oppression by Russia, most Lithuanians were partial to the Germans. Masha describes the process of her family's move to the two ghettos in Kaunas and Slobodka, including room assignments, formation of resistance, and education. Her mother's mother was taken by authorities for unknown reasons and never again seen. She describes a need to preserve one's self-image as a mensch as critical to maintain civility amidst the poor treatment.

Confined to the ghetto from 1941 until September, 1943, she left a hiding place to join her parents in a deportation as she feared they were too frail to handle it alone. They were sent by cattle car to a camp near Narva in Estonia. She describes the life in the camp. One of her friends in the camp was Heschel Glick, a poet, who was killed during an escape attempt. As Russian troops approached, all prisoners were marched away for a week to a small camp, Kiviõli, to build a second camp. Her father was taken away in a small group to be killed for unclear reasons.

Masha never encountered any Estonian Jews, presuming that the small community of 4500 was killed for their wealth or fled to Sweden. Masha, her mother and sister were among a large group sent to Tallinn, Estonia and placed on a boat to a camp by Stuttgart. While there, they worked at an ammunition plant before they were sent to Bergen-Belsen, where she said the conditions were the worst of her experience. Masha contracted typhus three days before liberation, but her mother cared for her.

[Interview ends abruptly.]